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1920.

**A BOOK OF THE
PASSION OF OUR
LORD**



HEAD OF THE CHRIST

A BOOK OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

DEPICTED BY THE OLD MASTERS

NEW YORK
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INTRODUCTION

HOW the painters of the Italian Renaissance came to illustrate the Gospel story, why they illustrated that story so well, and what "illustration" means, are the subject of the introduction to *A Book of the Childhood of Christ*. All that is there said might be repeated here, but it must be supposed that you, who have this book, will also possess the other. But because this book has for its subject the last days of the life of Jesus Christ upon earth, and that part of the Gospel story which most strongly stirs the heart and mind of Christians, you who are looking at the pictures printed in it must always remember that the great Italian painters of the Renaissance painted the greatest illustrations of that story ever painted, because they painted in simple faith and for love rather than, as often happens to-day, for money or from a desire to paint better than other painters.

All through the Bible the Jews are commanded not to worship graven images, and to abstain from idols: and these commands are continued in the New Testament. The Apostles, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, constantly repeated the same commands. Centuries passed, and the Christians, as they grew in numbers, continued sternly to repeat this order. Presently, here and there, a Christian painter ventured to try and draw the face or figure of Christ, or of the Virgin Mary with the Infant Saviour. Later these painters did more—they made pictures, that is to say, they tried to illustrate most of the scenes in the Gospels. But the supreme, that is the final, scene in the Gospels is the Crucifixion, and equally sacred, if less important, are the scenes of the Passion.

Pious painters feared to attempt to draw these "Holies of Holies" in their favourite subject. There were two chief reasons for this. The first was, no doubt, that to represent their God upon His Cross, seemed to the earliest painters something very like the making of a graven image such as the heathen worship. There is an early picture of the Crucifixion in the Catacombs, but this was, probably, not drawn until well into the eleventh century—over a thousand years after Christ was crucified.

While this feeling was probably the strongest of those which for so long prevented the early Christian painters from attempting to represent the Crucifixion, by the eleventh century innumerable Christians lived in countries, as in Italy, where there were no heathen. Idols were unknown things, heard of only in the Bible. At the same time, the painters were learning better and better both how to draw and how to paint. The best of them grew to be such good artists that they began to criticize themselves—to think whether their pictures were true and worthy representations of their subject. The more earnestly they sought to become good painters, and the more earnest they were in their religion, the more serious and difficult seemed to them the task of representing the final terrible scenes in the life of Jesus. Equally, when at last their desire to paint this subject overcame their doubts, you can feel sure that they brought to the attempt every gift of which they were masters.

It would be easy to find other reasons explaining this same backwardness on the part of painters. But a story of one of the greatest of them will explain better than anything else exactly how they felt. This story does not relate to a picture of the Crucifixion, but to one of the Last Supper, the Passover of the Jews, of which Jesus partook with his disciples in an Upper Chamber. You will find the description of the scene in the words from the Gospel printed on page 17, and a print of the picture, by Leonardo da Vinci, is on page 19. Opposite to it you will read something about it. Vasari, the great historian of the Italian painters of the Renaissance, relates in his life of Leonardo :—

“He also painted in Milan, for the Friars of Saint Dominic, at Santa Maria delle Grazie, a Last Supper, a most beautiful and marvellous thing; and to the heads of the Apostles he gave such majesty and beauty, that he left the head of Christ unfinished, not believing that he was able to give it that divine air which is essential to the image of Christ. This work, remaining thus all but finished, has ever been held by the Milanese in the greatest veneration, and also by strangers as well; for Leonardo imagined, and succeeded in expressing, that anxiety which had seized the Apostles in wishing to know who should betray their Master. For which reason in all their faces are seen love, fear, and wrath, or rather sorrow, at not being able to understand the meaning of Christ; which thing excites no less marvel than the sight, in contrast to it, of obstinacy, hatred and treachery in Judas; not to mention that every least part of the work displays an incredible diligence, seeing that even in the table-cloth the texture of the stuff is counterfeited in such a manner that linen could not seem more real.

“It is said that the Prior of that place kept pressing Leonardo, in a most importunate manner, to finish the work; for it seemed strange to him to see Leonardo sometimes stand half a day at a time, lost in contemplation, and he would have liked him to go on like the labourers hoeing in his garden, without ever stopping his brush.”

Vasari goes on to say that the Prior complained to the Duke of Milan about Leonardo's delay. The Duke therefore sent for the painter, who “reasoned much with him about art, and made him understand that men of lofty genius sometimes accomplish the most when they work the least, seeking out inventions with the mind, and forming those perfect ideas which the hands afterwards express, and reproduce, from the images already conceived in the brain. And he added that two heads were still wanting for him to paint: that of Christ, which he did not wish to seek on earth; and he could not think it was possible to conceive in the imagination that beauty and heavenly grace which should be the mark

of God incarnate. Next, there was wanting that of Judas, which was also troubling him, not thinking himself capable of imagining features that should represent the countenance of him who, after so many benefits received, had a mind so cruel as to resolve to betray his Lord, the Creator of the world. However, he would seek out a model for the latter. And so the poor Prior, in confusion, confined himself to urging on the work in the garden, and left Leonardo in peace, who finished only the head of Judas, which seems the very embodiment of treachery and inhumanity; but that of Christ, as has been said, remained unfinished."

Leonardo da Vinci was one of the world's greatest painters. Lesser painters often think that their works are perfect. But because his genius was so great, Leonardo's understanding of his own powers was as complete. Unhappily his perfect knowledge of himself made him undervalue those powers. He wished that all his paintings should be perfect, and when they were partly finished he would decide that they could never be perfect, and abandoned them. Thus Vasari, again, writes of him:—"In truth, one can believe that his vast and most excellent mind was hampered through being too full of desire, and that his wish ever to seek out excellence upon excellence, and perfection upon perfection, was the reason of it."

These stories of how the great Leonardo ever sought excellence and perfection, and would not finish a picture even to please the Duke of Milan until he felt able to paint it as his mind desired, are proof of what this Introduction has already told you—that this was the spirit in which the great Italian painters painted, and that the reason why their illustrations to the Gospel story are the finest illustrations of it ever made is because they painted in that spirit.

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ANTONELLO DA MESSINA: THE CRUCIFIXION

(National Gallery, London)

ALL great pictures represent noble subjects in a fine and beautiful way. When we look at them rightly they produce in us pure and noble feelings and make us love all beautiful things more than we did before. This is the aim of all great art, and when you see a subject represented in a disagreeable, ugly way, you may be quite sure, no matter how clever the artist may be, he does not belong to the company of the world's greatest painters. "The Crucifixion" by the Venetian, Antonello da Messina, on the cover of our book is the picture of the saddest and most painful subject, painted in the noblest and most beautiful fashion.

We know that because He loved us, Christ died upon the cross. Antonello makes us feel the love that underlies the sadness of the scene.

We see Christ lifted high on the cross against a calm blue sky and below is a peaceful landscape, while seated at the foot are His mother and S. John, the disciple He loved best, but they too are calm, they see His love and His sacrifice more clearly than His wounds and blood. On the ground lie many bones and skulls, reminding us that this is the place where criminals were executed. In the background, the city walls most likely represent the outer walls of Jerusalem, and men-at-arms ride up and down before them. On the other side is a lake with a little boat on it. Nearer at hand are three small figures, most likely the three Maries, and behind them are two men carrying a ladder—probably Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa. Antonello shows us all the signs of pain, of horror, the cross and the wounds, the bones and the skulls, but when we look at this picture we think more of peace and love and beauty than of sadness and pain, and that is what the painter wishes us to do.

It is impossible in so short a space to point out all the beauties of this most wonderful little picture, but go to the Venetian room in the National Gallery and look at it for yourselves.

I. HEAD OF THE CHRIST

CHRIST also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.

Jesu, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy Face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

All day long an eye is o'er us,
Which our every secret knows,
Sees our every step before us,
From first morn to evening's close.

LEONARDO DA VINCI: HEAD OF THE CHRIST

(The Brera, Milan)

YOU have read in the Introduction that it was a long time before the Italian artists tried to paint the scenes of the Passion of Our Lord, but the same thing cannot be said of pictures of Christ Himself. From the earliest times the faithful wanted to know what the Saviour looked like, and a tradition grew up as to the features of Christ. Some of the earliest portraits are ascribed to S. Luke, but perhaps the earliest of which we know anything definite are a mosaic in a Roman church, dating from the fourth century after Christ, and a fresco of about the same time in one of the catacombs. One story also tells us that Christ sent His portrait to Abgarus, king of Edessa, and at least two churches in Italy claim to possess this portrait, but it is very difficult to tell when these pictures really were painted.

After these early days, nearly all the artists tried to paint portraits of Christ, and a traditional type grew up from which not even the greatest of them departed. Christ is always depicted with an oval face, and fair, curling hair coming down over His shoulders. Thus, although the pictures by different artists varied in some particulars, there was enough likeness between them to make people believe that they really were portraits, and not only imaginary pictures of Christ.

One of the greatest of these pictures of Our Lord was painted by Leonardo da Vinci, of whom you have read in the Introduction, and who painted the great picture of the Last Supper, which comes third in this book. As the Introduction tells you, Leonardo never finished the head of Christ in that picture. So also this drawing of the head of Christ is unfinished.

II. THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

AND when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he shall send them.

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek, and sitting upon an ass, And a colt the foal of an ass.

And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying,

Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessèd is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Ride on! Ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
Bow thy meek head to mortal pain,
Then take, O God, thy power and reign.

FRA ANGELICO: THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

(*The Accademia, Florence*)

FRA ANGELICO was a friar of the Order of Saint Dominic, and his real name was Giovanni or John. He was such a good and lovable man that he was called "Angelico," that is "Angelic one," and after he died he was named "Beato" or "Blessed," a title only lower than that of Saint. When Fra Angelico was painting very few people could read or write, so that pictures were far more important as a means of teaching and explaining things than they are now. Fra Angelico being a very saintly man, wished to tell men about Christ and His life, and he painted numberless pictures whose subjects are taken from the Gospels. We see clearly in this picture how intently the painter is bent on showing us how Christ entered Jerusalem. He is riding on the ass while the little foal runs beside, and He raises His hand in blessing while the multitude follow with branches in their hands; one bystander alone bears a palm branch though two have been thrown on the ground. Christ's path is strewn with flowers and leaves, and one man spreads his cloak in the way that the ass may step upon it. Fra Angelico's trees are very unsuccessful, but it is extremely surprising that he should have painted something that is not really like a tree at all, just a stump with a bunch of leaves growing out of the top. The rocks too do not resemble rocks much more than the trees resemble trees. Clearly the painter spent all his pains and labour on the figures and took very little interest in the rocks and trees that form the background of his picture.



THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

III. THE LAST SUPPER

NOW when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Bread of the world, in mercy broken,
Wine of the soul, in mercy shed ;
By whom the words of life were spoken,
And in whose death our sins are dead ;
Look on the heart by sorrow broken,
Look on the tears by sinners shed ;
And be Thy feast to us the token
That by Thy grace our souls are fed.

LEONARDO DA VINCI: THE LAST SUPPER

(Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan)

IN the *Refectory* or dining hall, of the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie, upon the outskirts of the City of Milan, is still to be seen this fresco or wall-painting. As the reproduction shows, it has been greatly damaged by time and misuse since Leonardo last worked on it in the year 1497. The great hall, the whole of one end of which it covers, fell, in the course of centuries, into something very like ruin, and damp has greatly injured the painting. Although now carefully restored, this hall was for a long time used as a stable. A doorway was, even, cut through the lower part of the picture, as the reproduction shows. And if these things were not enough, King Louis XII once tried to remove the wall itself in order to take the picture to France.

The Introduction to this book (page 6) tells how Leonardo painted this picture. Anyone can see that the picture very clearly indicates how the disciples were moved in their minds at the words, which Jesus is depicted as uttering, "One of you that eateth with me shall betray me." The picture, indeed, is one which could only have been painted by an Italian. Compared with an Englishman, an Italian is excitable. While we talk, he both talks and gesticulates—that is, "speaks" with his limbs and his body as well as his tongue. You cannot paint the words that a man is uttering. You can paint men, as here, gesticulating, and their gestures can be as clear as words. No Englishman can understand this picture unless he remembers that action can be as full of meaning as is speech.

Taking the figures in the picture from left to right, there are on each side two groups of three figures, while in the midst of all Jesus Christ sits. The twelve disciples sit in this order, counting from left to right :—

Bartholomew, James the Less and Andrew: Judas, Peter and John: Thomas, James and Philip: Matthew, Thaddeus and Simon.



THE LAST SUPPER

The moment represented is that when Christ has said : " One of you shall betray me." Judas is seated third on the right of his Master (he is the fourth figure from the left side of the picture) at whom he stares guiltily, while he leans with his right elbow on the table and holds the money-bag. The traditional pose for S. John—leaning on Christ's bosom—is not observed ; his attitude seems to express the resignation of despair, that of all the others intense excitement. Leonardo has observed that in moments of excitement a company forms itself into small groups. Accordingly he meets the difficulty of painting a long row of figures seated side by side, a difficulty which makes most pictures of this scene appear unreal, by dividing the twelve into four groups—each of three—as we have above noticed is the case.

IV. CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET

AND supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cleanse from every sin;
Let the healing streams abound;
Make and keep me pure within.

FRA ANGELICO: CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET

(Florence)

IN this picture, Fra Angelico wanted to tell people of Christ's humility and of how he came on earth to be the servant of all.

He wished to show the disciples tired and dusty after their long walk, resting in the shade while their Master, who was just as tired as they were, waited upon them, washing their feet. Fra Angelico had never seen the hot sand and rock of Palestine, but he knew well the grateful relief of coming into the quiet of the shady convent cloister out of the burning Italian sun, so he represents the disciples and their Master in one of the open cloisters set round an open space of green such as may be seen in Italy at the present day. The deep shade of the tiled roof shuts out all but a strip of hot blue sky. The disciples sit in a circle on little stools, while Christ, girt with a towel, is about to bathe S. Peter's feet, who raises his hand in protest. Two of the disciples in the foreground are taking off their hose and shoes and one brings in the water. Everything is very quiet, and those of the apostles who are talking, speak in low tones. The whole scene, like all else that Fra Angelico painted, is touched with his spirit of peace and true religion.



CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET

V. THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

WHEN Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden. And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.

And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Go to dark Gethsemane,
Ye that feel the Tempter's power;
Your Redeemer's conflict see,
Watch with him one bitter hour;
Turn not from his griefs away,
Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

BERNA: THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

(The Collegiata, San Gimignano)

THE Sienese painter Berna died in the year 1381, so that this picture was painted earlier than any other in the book, with the exception of the "Three Maries at the Sepulchre" by Duccio (1216-1299) and the "Descent from the Cross" by Giotto (1324-1368). For that reason it is painted in a simpler and more child-like manner than the rest. In the early days of the Middle Ages the painters found it very difficult to represent the scenes they painted in a life-like fashion, but nevertheless they knew how to tell a story in the plainest possible way. Berna here wishes to tell us about Christ's agony in the garden, and he shows us Christ kneeling on a little hill apart from the disciples, being comforted by an angel. Behind Him, sitting on the ground, are the three chosen disciples, and we see them with their eyes shut, fast asleep. S. John wearily leans his head against the trunk of a tree which he clasps with both arms; beneath, on a lower terrace of the hill, are the remaining disciples, and they too are soundly sleeping. The scene is clearly laid in a garden: in the foreground there are flowers and on the slopes of the hill are lemon trees, while on the top are three tall trees, each one of a different foliage.

Berna found it very difficult to draw, but he has thoroughly succeeded in what he set out to do, that is to tell the story of Christ's agony in the garden in the clearest fashion. This picture is part of a series painted by Berna on the walls of the principal church of San Gimignano illustrating stories from the New Testament. Unhappily before they were quite finished he fell from a scaffold and died two days later, to the great grief of the people of San Gimignano, and he was buried in the church he had adorned with so many beautiful pictures.



THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

VI. THE KISS OF JUDAS

AND Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, Master; and kissed him. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. They went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he.

From the depth of nature's blindness,
From the hardening power of sin,
From all malice and unkindness,
From the pride that lurks within:
By thy mercy, O deliver us, good Lord.

FRA ANGELICO: THE KISS OF JUDAS

(San Marco, Florence)

THIS picture is painted in fresco—that is to say, instead of being done on a wooden panel with paints mixed with egg or oil, it was painted on a wall covered with wet plaster. In this kind of work the artists were obliged to paint very quickly indeed because the plaster dried rapidly. It was a method much in favour with Italian painters, and countless churches and convents were decorated in this way. This picture is one of those painted by Fra Angelico and his pupils on the walls of the friars' cells in the Convent of San Marco, and there the picture may still be seen. Judas, who is about to give the traitor's kiss, has a halo because he had been called to be one of the disciples, but to mark his infamy, Fra Angelico has painted it black instead of golden.



THE KISS OF JUDAS

VII. CHRIST BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST

AND the chief priest and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith: What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him.

See him in the judgment hall,
Beaten, bound, reviled, arraigned :
See him meekly bearing all :
Love to man his soul sustained.
Shun not suffering, shame or loss ;
Learn of Christ to bear the Cross.

FRA ANGELICO: CHRIST BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST

(The Accademia, Florence)

IN the Middle Ages the churches and convents were full of beautiful furniture and decorations painted and carved by the artists, sculptors and goldsmiths of the day. Italian cities were rich, and the ruling nobles and wealthy merchants used often to order pictures and shrines, illuminated manuscripts and embroidered vestments for use in their favourite churches. From 1418 to 1436 Fra Angelico and his brother Fra Benedetto lived and worked in the Dominican convent at Fiesole on the hills above Florence, and while they were there Cosimo de Medici, the wise and crafty ruler of Florence, commissioned the two brothers (for Fra Benedetto painted only less well than did Fra Angelico) to decorate the great chest of the Sacristy or vestry of the Church of the Annunciation at Florence, with thirty-five pictures, each measuring fifteen inches square. This picture of Christ before the High Priest is one of the set. It is a wonderfully simple and dignified representation of the scene, but there is no attempt to give any idea of atmosphere. We know that Christ was brought before Caiaphas very early in the morning, but there is nothing in the picture to suggest it is not mid-day.

Fra Angelico represents the soldiers as wearing chain armour which already in his own day had become ancient and out of date, but this he did to impress on those who looked at the picture that these things happened a long time ago. The inscription at the top of the picture is in Latin from the Old Testament, "They shall strike the jaw of the judge of Israel," Micah v., and that at the bottom from the New, "One of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying, Dost thou answer the High Priest so?" John xviii.

The verse, the 22nd of the 18th chapter of S. John, is not quite the same as in our own Bible because it is from the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible made by S. Jerome.



CHRIST BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST

VIII. THE CRUCIFIXION

AND it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,

JESUS OF NAZARETH
THE KING OF THE JEWS

This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.

Thy life was given for me;
Thy blood, O Lord, was shed
That I might ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead.
Thy life was given for me:
What have I given for Thee?

PIETRO PERUGINO: THE CRUCIFIXION

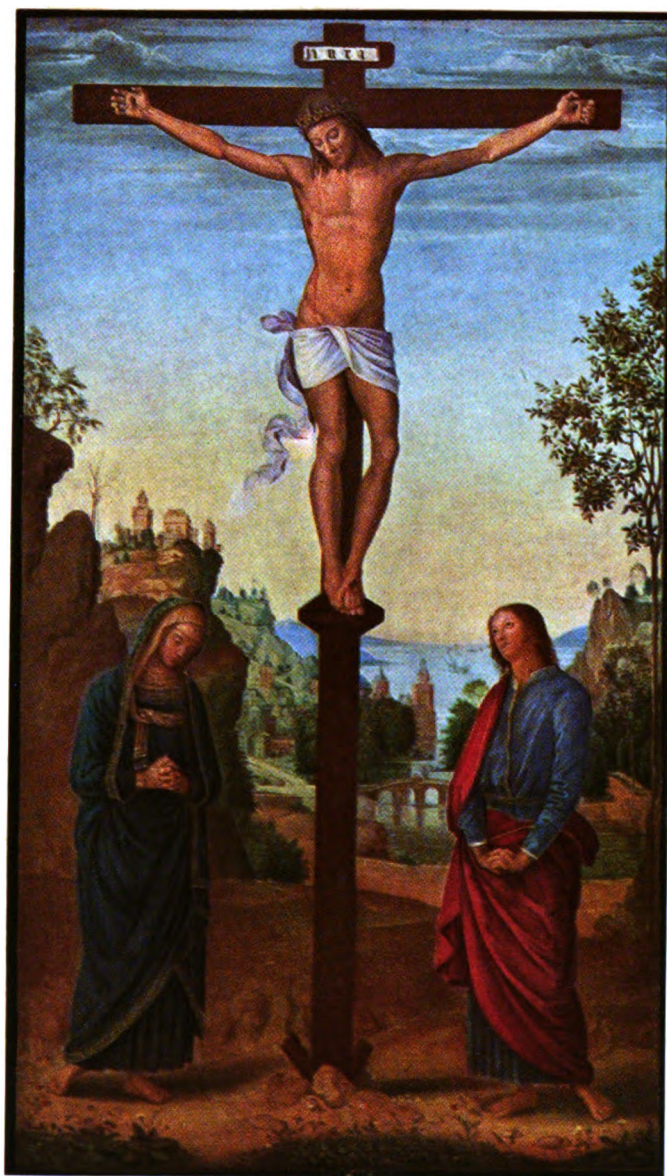
(*Hermitage, Petrograd*)

THIS picture, like that on the cover, is not intended to represent what actually happened on the sad day of Christ's death, but to set before us the *thought* of His Crucifixion and His love towards men. Again, as in our first picture we see Christ nailed to a very high cross, while the Blessed Virgin and S. John stand at its foot. Behind the cross is a landscape of the greatest sweetness and beauty: on the top of a cliff on the left is a castle, and below, just where the river enters a lake, is a town set among trees containing many fine buildings: a high-backed bridge crosses the gently flowing river, and some people are going over it on their way to the broad road that leads to the town.

Where the cross stands the air is calm and windless, but out on the lake there is a fresh breeze that fills the sail of the little ship that is beating up between the blue mountains that border the lake on either side.

There is in the whole picture a clear, soft light, which is certainly not sunlight, and yet gives us the same feeling of happiness that we have on a warm and gentle day in spring when the birds are singing and the flowers are coming into bud. For all its sad subject it is a happy picture.

Pietro Perugino was a great painter, but it has been told of him from very early times that he was miserly and fond of money. He was very famous in his day, and rich people from all parts commissioned him to paint pictures, and when he found that a particular type of saint and angel was very popular and commanded a high price, he repeated the same figures again and again for different customers till at last they began to object. The pictures he painted quickly in this way for money were never his best, but our picture of the Crucifixion belongs to his finest time and has quite clearly been painted for love and not for gain.



THE CRUCIFIXION

IX. THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS

AND; behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man and a just: (the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathæa, a city of the Jews; who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen.

Is it not strange, the darkest hour
That ever dawned on sinful earth
Should touch the heart with softer power
For comfort, than an angel's mirth?
That to the Cross the mourner's eye should turn
Sooner than where the stars of Christmas burn?

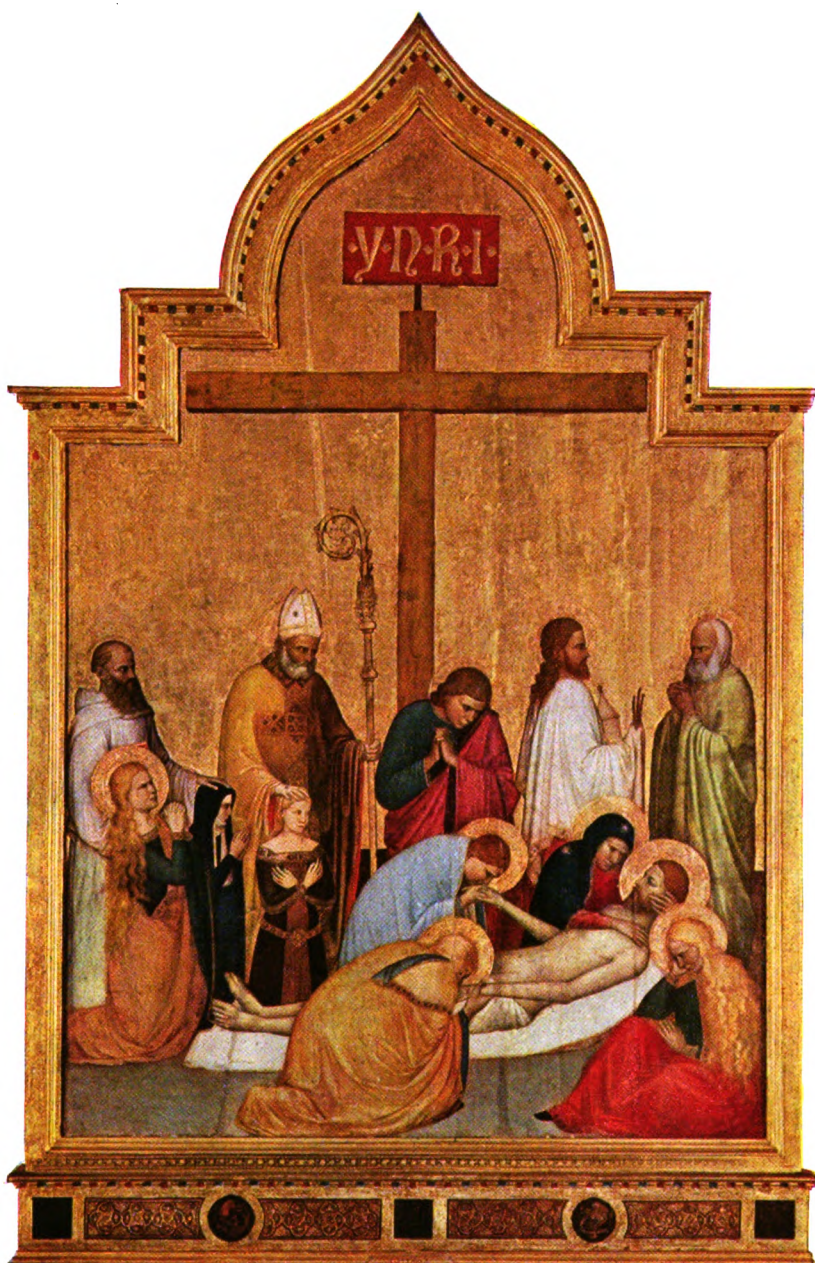
Sooner than where the Easter sun
Shines glorious on yon open grave,
And to and fro the tidings run,
"Who died to heal, is risen to save"?
Sooner than where upon the Saviour's friends
The very Comforter in light and love descends?

GIOTTINO: THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS

(Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

GIOTTINO was born in 1324, and was still living in 1368. He was one of the early painters and, like Berna whose picture of the "Agony in the Garden" you have already seen, he found it very hard to draw people in perspective and in natural attitudes. This picture was painted for the church of San Romeo in Florence, and no doubt it was ordered and paid for by the two ladies, one richly dressed, the other a nun, who kneel on the left of the picture. In those days it was counted a good deed to give a picture to a church, and the person who gave it generally told the painter to include a portrait of himself among the holy personages in the picture. Each of these ladies is accompanied by her patron saint. S. Romualdus protects the nun, while the Bishop Zenobius, a famous saint of Florence, lays his hand on the other lady's head. The Blessed Virgin tenderly embraces Our Lord, and S. John the Evangelist bends over Him, while the two Maries, one on either side, kiss His dead hands. Mary Magdalene kneels at Christ's feet. The two Saints who stand facing each other on the right are Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathæa who bears a pot of ointment and a budding staff. It is difficult to say who the female saint seated in the corner may be.

This is the most famous of all Giotto's works, and has been painted with the greatest love and care. The background is of burnished gold, as is almost always the case in early pictures painted on panels of wood. It is only in the early wall paintings painted on wet plaster that we find a background of trees and houses. The gilding of these early pictures was a matter of some difficulty, as the thin gold leaf had to be carefully laid on over a gesso or plaster foundation and then burnished. Very often the painters only painted the coloured parts of their picture and left the gold to be put on by the gilders, a practice that led to frequent quarrels and disputes between them.



THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS

X. THE ENTOMBMENT

AND there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. And Joseph rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.

Deep in the rock's sepulchral shade
The Lord, by whom the world was made,
The Saviour of mankind, is laid.

O hearts bereaved and sore distressed,
Here is for you a place of rest,
Here leave your griefs on Jesus' breast.

FRANCESCO FRANCIA: THE ENTOMBMENT

(*National Gallery*)

THIS picture would have been called a Pietá, or The Pity of Our Lord, by its painter, Francia: that is to say, a representation of the dead Christ on His mother's knees. It was painted to fit on to the top of another large picture by the same artist, which is also in the National Gallery, "The Virgin and Child with S. Anne." Both pictures were painted in 1510 for a rich man, Benedetto Buonvisi, who built a chapel in the church of San Frediano at Lucca, and commissioned Francia to paint these two pictures to hang above the altar.

In the Middle Ages the sculptors, painters and goldsmiths all belonged to their own guilds or societies, and their workshops were crowded with apprentices and assistants. The arts were very closely connected, and very often a painter did goldsmiths' work as well as painting, and sometimes a goldsmith went on to be a painter. Francia was one of the latter, for he was brought up as a goldsmith and did not begin to paint till he was forty. He was proud of being a goldsmith, and often signed his pictures "Francia Aurifex," that is, Francia the Goldsmith.

In all our other pictures you will notice that the Blessed Virgin is represented as being quite young at the time of the Crucifixion, but Francia shows her as she must have been, an elderly woman.

Francia tries to paint people as they really were in life, and with some artists this would lead to the painting of ugly things; but Francia and the early painters loved beauty so much that it was impossible for them to paint ugliness. Though the Virgin is old and sorrowful and her eyes are red with weeping, yet she is beautiful in a sad and noble way. Christ's face and form are full of beauty, for His sacrifice is completed.



OUR LORD'S PITY

XI. THE THREE MARIES AT THE SEPULCHRE

AND when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid.

The strife is o'er, the battle done ;
Now is the Victor's triumph won ;
O let the song of praise be sung,
Alleluia !

DUCCIO DA BUONINSEGNA: THE THREE MARIES AT THE SEPULCHRE

(Opera del Duomo, Siena)

IN the Middle Ages artists were very fond of painting pictures of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and we have countless reproductions of this subject—either of the Madonna alone, or with the Child Christ—as every painter has given us some such pictures, while some of the early ones painted practically nothing else. We also have many pictures of Mary Magdalene, whose story appealed to the people of those days, but there are very few pictures of the three Maries going to the Saviour's tomb on Easter Day. This may be due to the usual reluctance on the part of these early artists to paint scenes of the Passion, or it may be because this part of the story of Our Lord did not appeal to them. We have many pictures of Christ arising from the tomb while the soldiers sleep, but hardly any of the scene at the tomb including these three women.

This picture is by Duccio, a painter of Siena, who lived earlier than any other painter whose pictures are shown in this book. You can see that the figures are still stiff and badly drawn, and that the background of sky is all in gold. The early artists nearly always painted gold backgrounds in their pictures, thinking thus to make them more valuable, just as they sometimes put real jewels in the crowns which they gave to their Madonnas. They did not yet know enough about painting to understand that a picture which is true to nature is really more valuable than one that is merely adorned with gold and precious stones.



THE THREE MARIES AT THE SEPULCHRE

XII. NOLI ME TANGERE

BUT Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre. And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

Comes, at last, a voice of thrilling gladness,
Borne on the breezes of the rising day;
Saying, the Lord shall make an end of sadness,
Saying, the Lord shall wipe all tears away.

FRA ANGELICO: NOLI ME TANGERE

(San Marco, Florence)

IN 1436 Fra Angelico and his brother Fra Benedetto were ordered to leave their convent on the hill at Fiesole and go to the lately restored Dominican convent of San Marco down in the city of Florence, and there, on the freshly plastered walls, Fra Angelico, aided by his brother and a band of pupils, painted a wonderful series of pictures. In the chapter house he painted his great Crucifixion, a work it took him nearly six years to complete. In the cloisters there are five pictures by him illustrating the rules of the Dominican Order : Silence, Obedience, Sacrifice, Learning and Charity, and in every living room and in thirty-two of the cells there is painted a scene from the life of Christ. Our illustration is from one of these little rooms, and its title, "Noli me tangere," means "Touch me not." It is part of a very beautiful picture of Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene. Fra Angelico shows the moment when Mary, overjoyed, falls on her knees stretching out her hands towards Him ; in the lower corner on the left it is just possible to make out three fingers of the Saint's hand. Christ gently motions her back with one wounded hand, while in the other He bears a gardener's spade : behind His head is the halo with a red cross, of which Fra Angelico always made use when he painted the figure of Christ. The painter has spared no pains to show us that Mary Magdalene finds her Lord again, in a garden. He stands among flowers and green herbage, and the garden is cut off from the forest by a high wooden fence, and the picture has the fresh coolness of the early dawn.



NOLI ME TANGERE

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